

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting Summary
June 28, 2018 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
MassDEP, One Winter Street, Boston, MA

Universal Recycling List and Statewide Recycling Communication Initiative

Brooke Nash of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) presented on MassDEP's recent efforts to reduce recycling contamination and improve the quality of recyclables collected. This includes working with materials recovery facilities (MRFs) to develop a universal list that specifies which materials are accepted at all Massachusetts MRFs and which items should not be placed in recycling containers. The presentation also covered MassDEP's plans for statewide recycling outreach and continued rollout of the Recycling IQ Kit to help raise awareness about recycling quality and contamination. This presentation is posted along with this meeting summary on the MassDEP SWAC web page.

Q: Will the universal recycling list be available online?

A: Yes, the top level categories and the key items not to place in recycling containers will be marketed to the public and there will be a searchable table with more specific items. MassDEP will also provide information on available take-back locations for recyclable items that are not collected curbside.

Comment: The need for less contamination in recyclables seems like a good opportunity to reinforce which containers have deposits on them. These can be refunded instead of going to a MRF, resulting in a higher quality end product.

Q: Right now, there is a plastic bag ban bill on the table, and there is little opposition. Has MassDEP spoken with the State House/Speaker's office about its potential role in reducing contamination?

A: No, the Speaker has not asked MassDEP for a position on this legislation.

Comment: Now that some towns have bans and some do not, industry associations might prefer consistency, such as a ban for bags everywhere.

Q: In the city of Boston, people are told to put recyclables out in a plastic bag (North End, Beacon Hill, South End). This goes against what we're trying to teach consumers in other parts of the state. Is MassDEP going to work with the City?

A: Bagged recyclables are not acceptable in cart programs, but Casella tears bags open specifically for Boston residents. Yes, MassDEP will work with the City of Boston on their program.

Q: On the North Shore, more plastic containers seem to be accepted with recycling than are listed, so behavior change may take a while.

A: MassDEP expects change to be gradual, especially for communities with acceptable materials specified in existing contracts. MassDEP also believes that continued outreach will be needed over time.

Panel: Perspectives on Massachusetts Solid Waste and Recycling Infrastructure

Chris Lucarelle, Waste Management:

- *MRFs are full and operating at capacity.*
- *Making investments (equipment, etc.) to improve quality.*
- *Closures are putting strain on existing infrastructure. Recycling needs to be viable to make further infrastructure investments.*
- *Two main points to communicate: recycling is not “free” and contamination needs to decrease.*
- *There is a great deal of value in a unified recycling list that applies to all Massachusetts facilities.*
- *Still opportunities to improve diversion of waste ban materials.*
- *Food waste has plenty of capacity and therefore a lot of opportunities.*

George Drew, Covanta:

- *Some facilities have been around for 20-30 years, with a need for continued investment and maintenance. However, this comes at a price.*
- *Energy prices have an impact. The amount of money we receive for electricity has dropped. This makes it more difficult to operate, especially for the smaller facilities.*
- *Some costs are the same, no matter the size of the facility, although not all facilities generate the same revenue.*
- *Potential trend of increased heating value, which reduces capacity and the number of tons that can be managed. When the facility makes the maximum amount of steam, that's when they stop burning.*
- *Wants recycling to work - it is in our best interest to recycle.*

- *Want to ensure capacity for ash. Researching what is in the ash and working on extracting metals. Need to work with agencies to make ash products more marketable.*

Matt Hughes, Wheelabrator:

- *Operations largely the same as what George described at Covanta.*
- *If there is an extended outage at one facility, it can affect delivery volumes that other facilities receive – truck traffic, etc.*
- *Operating enhanced metal recovery systems at some ash monofills to capture additional ferrous and non-ferrous metal for recycling.*
- *There's a huge opportunity for diverting more commercial organic material. Commercial organics loads are seen at Saugus.*
- *Energy pricing can be challenging with depressed prices for other energy sources.*

Tom Mackie, Mackie Shea, PC:

- *Municipalities are not legally required to provide disposal services, but the MassDEP's responsibility is to protect public health and the environment.*
- *Under Solid Waste Act of 1987, MassDEP legally had most of the control over siting, but case law supports that municipalities also have jurisdiction over site assignment.*
- *Worked with clients who wanted to take advantage of materials that fall under the waste bans i.e. C&D wood, gypsum wallboard. State policies have not been fully aligned to support beneficial reuse such that developers are wary of investing.*
- *MassDEP should be steady, consistent, and keep it simple so that investors have a stable regulatory platform.*

John Hanselman, Vanguard Renewables:

- *Started out hoping that the organics ban would drive materials to us.*
- *Continuing to build capacity, but surprised at companies slow to adopt - why aren't companies flocking towards AD? Price, environmental benefits and compliance should be motivators.*

- *The biggest challenge is education. Most people covered under the ban are aware of it, but they need to understand what it actually takes to divert food waste.*
- *At the beginning, technology and reliability were challenges for Vanguard, which caused concern for hauling partners.*
- *We can take everything now consistently, including packaging. The organics industry needs to promote this message.*

Questions for Panel Participants

Q: In the 2010 Solid Waste Master Plan, it was said that Massachusetts would entertain new technologies to open up capacity. So far, nothing has been permitted. What are the barriers?

A: There are a number of reasons, including regulatory uncertainty. There are a lot of clean energy investors looking at waste as a way of creating energy. However, they are skeptical due to past experiences and no real record of successful implementation in the United States. Also, environmental advocacy organizations might oppose it. The Taunton project failed due to lack of commitment from haulers, who were skeptical that the technology might fail or not be reliable. New operations need 10-20 year waste acquisition contracts. And finally, it comes down to scalability and economics. So long as landfills exist, the economics might not make sense.

Q: What do we do to prevent packaged foods from reaching waste-to-energy plants?

A: MassDEP has a tiered system to deal with all waste ban materials. As an example, WTE plants notify haulers, who in turn can notify the generators. WTE facilities can also notify generators directly. MassDEP can also potentially visit generators with enforcement personnel.

C: The lack of infrastructure prevents new technologies. It would be nice to see a demonstration project to show that co-collection works.

A: MassDEP has the authority to allow demonstration projects. Permit modifications may not be necessary in these cases.

Q: What will be the impacts of the upcoming landfill closures? (Chicopee, Southbridge and Taunton)

A: We may see the waste go west (Ohio) by rail. Long haul is hard to come by and the rail infrastructure is not there yet. This highlights a sense of urgency to recycle more and encourage increased organics collection.

Comment: If recycling is not economically viable, the solid waste infrastructure cannot handle that additional tonnage.

Comment: Capacity is so tight, if there is a backup in one facility, it affects the whole system.

Q: Does MassDEP have any authority to regulate upstream? There are capacity issues everywhere; how do we decrease the waste we are generating? Can MassDEP work with brand owners?

A: It takes statutory authority to move further upstream. This happened for in the case of mercury, but for now we would need the Legislature to vote on a similar bill to grant MassDEP authority.

Comment: To ask waste management businesses to decrease waste is not fair. However, people need to reduce waste generation, and we need to find a way to incentivize reduction. For instance: Increased landfill and WTE tipping fees. Single stream creates a lower quality product. MassDEP should promote source separation and dual stream collection, and ban items that are not recyclable. Waste companies push back on things like the Bottle Bill, which produces clean recyclables but does not generate as much revenue. MassDEP needs to step up on waste ban enforcement. With more waste ban inspectors, cardboard could be eliminated from landfills statewide. We can't expect waste companies to advocate what is best for people and the environment.

Comment: MassDEP should use the previous SWMP and examine the data to see if real progress has been made. The annual updates do not provide measurable progress goals. Future updates should be linked to the Plan goals. We really need to talk about materials management when discussing capacity. Reduction is part of this too. It doesn't make money, but it is important.

Comment: The waste industry should not be vilified for "making money at the expense of the environment."

Comment: MassDEP has made progress, but there is a lot of progress still to be made. The state has shown a strong commitment toward more recovery and less disposal as well as reduced generation. However, the infrastructure we have right now still needs to function to protect public health and the environment.

Comment: The mercury bill took 10 years to push through the Legislature and secure the necessary resources. The updated Bottle Bill failed when the beverage industry spent \$10 million to oppose it. 80 cities and towns have banned plastic bags. For the next Master Plan, we should start at diversion. Instead of looking at capacity, we should start by looking at diversion. The name of the Plan should be changed to the "Zero Waste Master Plan." There needs to be more communication with the Legislature. Many legislators do not know enough about what MassDEP does.

Comment: As a (waste) business, we have an obligation to make money. But day to day, we spend our time addressing customer problems, not talking about making money. The system operates most reliably when there is surplus capacity.